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# How YOU Can Be the One Reporters Call

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THE GUIDE TO INTRODUCING YOURSELF AS A SOURCE TO THE MEDIA

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# How **YOU** Can Be the One Reporters Call

## The Guide to Introducing Yourself as a Source to the Media

When you see an executive with a similar business quoted in the news, do you think: ***Why did the reporter speak to her and not me? I'm so much smarter.***

The answer is: Reporters call the people they know. They don't call someone they have never heard of.

Why would they call you if they do not know what you might say or the topics on which you might have insights?

In this e-book, you will get ***step-by-step guidance*** on how to present yourself to a reporter as an authoritative source on a compelling business issue that the publication's readers need to know more about, now.

*“ Reporters call the people they know. They don't call someone they have never heard of. ”*

Reporters face tremendous pressure to publish their stories quickly. When you make it easy for journalists to locate you as an attorney available for comment on key issues, you increase your chances of being the person who gets the phone call and gets quoted.

The universe of media opportunities may be divided in three groups based on sensitivity to time: **evergreen**, which is irrespective of date; **planned date** and **highly time-sensitive**. The tools to be used in each circumstance are similar: **Executive Media Profile** and **Pitch Letter**.

### **1. Evergreen:**

There are innumerable opportunities to comment to reporters regarding ongoing business issues: industry trends, consumer preferences, operations, regulations, employment, marketing and local matters, among others.

Reporters at publications with an industry specialization also seek tips, insights and case studies so readers can benefit from your experience and lessons learned.

Consider recent projects and work performed with clients that might provide the basis for developing a case study, one that would be relevant at any time of the year. Perhaps the format of *lessons learned* is appropriate.

## 1. a. Executive Media Profile

To introduce yourself as a credible source for comment, draft an **Executive Media Profile**. Unlike a press release, resume or a speaker bio, an Executive Media Profile establishes credentials and answers the essential questions of a skeptical reporter. **Why YOU?** and **Why NOW?**

Your profile will present insights that will help the readers of that publication **SAVE TIME, SAVE MONEY** or **MAKE MORE MONEY**. You must also indicate why this topic is important, starting today and going forward. An Executive Media Profile focuses on several hot issues that reporters are not granting much attention and presents your new perspective.

First, summarize **three areas where you are most knowledgeable** and narrow the niche: perhaps investing in renewable energy companies or cybersecurity issues for independent insurance agencies. In three sentences and no more than six lines, mention a few themes. If you are a *former senior executive of a company that is a household name*, you may mention your availability to *comment on that specific industry*.

“ *An Executive Media Profile establishes credentials and answers WHY YOU? and WHY NOW?* ”

***(Executive Media Profile, continued)***

Next, **assemble three to five timely issues** that resonate with the readers of the publication. This **bullet-format list** may address the bottom-line impact of regulatory changes, trends in industry consolidation or the state of the market. These topics will probably have a direct effect on sales, operations, finances and so on.

Each idea is listed on one line and demonstrates that you understand what keeps executives and readers up at night. Brevity rules here; you'll have time to provide more depth and nuance during a subsequent conversation or interview.

To help you formulate some ideas, you may consult the **Appendix** for big picture questions that are suggestive of trends.

Include a quote of two or three sentences with a meaty insight, as an example of what you might say in an interview.

Finally, at the top of the page, clearly state your **contact information**, making it readily accessible: Name, title at company name, e-mail address and direct phone number.

Speaking at the Law Firm Media Professionals meeting in New York in March 2015, Bill Donahue, IP reporter at *Law 360*, asked for “a 50-word explanation of what an attorney knows about a subject to determine whether it is worth calling the attorney.”

That reporter’s request confirms that an Executive Media Profile is the approach that journalists prefer in order to select a business executive or an attorney as a source.

Following Donahue’s 50 words as a guideline, **keep the bio, bullets and quote under 250 words in total**, similar to the sample Executive Media Profile in the Appendix.

An attorney specializing in bankruptcy had clients in the airline industry. I used an Executive Media Profile to introduce her to a reporter at Reuters who followed the airline companies. Their 45-minute casual interview over coffee led to an article in which she was quoted extensively, as was an industry analyst, regarding the business prospects for airline companies. The newswire story was picked up in numerous print publications worldwide.

“ *a 50-word explanation . . . to determine whether it is worth calling (the attorney).* ”

## 1. b. Pitch Letter

A **Pitch Letter** identifies a single topic, then provides a few bullet points and expresses interest in arranging an interview or perhaps submitting an authored article, known as a by-line.

Consider including a client or other contact who may offer insights on the subject. Imagine a pitch letter with a case study or a timely topic, plus a referral to a business professional or client – all in one package. A reporter may find it hard to resist this easy-to-interview-and-write opportunity.

An executive whose company provides an innovative wireless security system for artworks and other unique valuables worked with a professional at an insurance company that sells policies to art collectors. Using a Pitch Letter, I contacted editors of insurance industry publications; I suggested him as a source on the subject of security, insurance and the art market.

This led to interviews in ***Insurance Journal, Rough Notes*** and ***Insurance Innovation Reporter***, leading publications that serve his target audience of insurance brokers. The articles discussed the issue of art theft and how the security system addressed insurance underwriter concerns. Some articles also featured the endorsement of the insurance professional regarding the value of the product.

Industry trade publications are especially interested in sources who write articles that address hot topics and give examples of case studies. Readers can learn a lesson from another company's experience and apply it to their own business.



*(Pitch Letter, continued)*

Because publications have varied requirements for article length, *anywhere from 500 to 2,500 words*, it is best to **offer an outline** and then write the article to the prescribed length. Writing an article prior to submission inevitably entails cosmetic or substantial editing to achieve the required word count.

**2. Planned Date**

A review of the calendar may yield ideas and issues to discuss with reporters. Certain events are scheduled on an annual, biennial or quadrennial basis, such as holidays, trade shows, Congressional elections, the Olympics and the US presidential election. Other events have known dates: expiration of union contracts and effective dates to comply with certain requirements. The end of the calendar or fiscal year and the start of the new year may be a time to predict what lies ahead for the industry. The **Appendix** offers some suggestive questions to generate topics.

“ *Many media opportunities are . . . evergreen, irrespective of date; others have a planned date or are time-sensitive.* ”

### 3. Time-Sensitive

Whether or not you have been introduced to reporters as a credible source, you may wish to capitalize on news about a company that everyone is watching.

Using the **Executive Media Profile** or **Pitch Letter** format, compose an incisive quote that addresses the current situation. Speculate on next steps or what the possible impact may be for companies or an individual in that business situation. You should address several possible outcomes, such as the likelihood of Scenario A and Scenario B.

When Lehman Brothers was on the verge of financial collapse in September 2008, its executives and legal counsel considered segregating the firm's assets and depositing the most toxic ones in a separate entity. I introduced an attorney to reporters; he had been General Counsel of a bank that undergone this *good bank, bad bank* process. His interviews generated substantial quotes in articles in *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal* and *Bloomberg News* discussing the prospect of this approach to re-configure Lehman.

“ Offer an incisive quote about the situation . . . (and) the likelihood of Scenarios A or B. ”

## **Conclusion**

Finally, be alert that not every call from a reporter is an opportunity for a positive interaction. You may receive an unanticipated phone call from a reporter, with whom you have not previously been in contact. Consider that she may know something you do not, or she may wish to ask questions about something you are not yet prepared to discuss.

Use this script and share it with your colleagues:

“I’d really like to talk with you, but I have someone in my office now. If you would please give me your name and number, I’ll call you back in a half hour. And, in case I need to gather any specific information, please let me know what you’d like to discuss, ***so that I can be more helpful to you.***”

This approach allows you to call the reporter ***when you are ready.*** You will have time to take a breath, learn more about the situation from staff and gather relevant data. You may also wish to speak with your legal counsel and Public Relations professional to address any potential upside and downside of a response.

***(Conclusion, continued)***

You'll be able to draft a statement that is **responsive** to the reporter's question, but **not newsworthy or quotable**.

Do NOT say NO COMMENT.

There's little benefit, and possibly a negative impression, when a news story says, "Company ABC had no comment," or "A representative of the company did not return a reporter's phone call."

If there is a reason that you cannot comment, such as client confidentiality, proprietary information or a company policy, then offer that reason and repeat it as often as it takes to politely end the interview.



*(Conclusion, continued)*

Reporters call the people they know.

They rarely call someone they have never heard of.

If it's likely that a business executive will be quoted in a news story, **YOU** may become that source by preparing and distributing an **Executive Media Profile** or **Pitch Letter** so **YOU** will be the one reporters call.

# READY TO *INTRODUCE* YOURSELF?

Contact Janet Falk for a **FREE** 30-minute consultation so **YOU** can be the one reporters call.

Invite Janet Falk to conduct a **one-hour private workshop** on Media Relations for a minimum of six professionals, similar to sessions given at the New York City Bar Association, New York County Lawyers Association and New Jersey State Bar Association. As host you attend for FREE; all others pay a fee. No travel expenses in the New York City area.

Janet Falk of Falk Communications and Research provides Media Relations and Marketing Communications services to law firms, business owners, consultants and nonprofits.

Contact her at **212.677.5770** or **Janet@JanetLFalk.com**.

Read more tips when you **subscribe** to her monthly newsletter.

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# APPENDIX

Sample Executive Media Profile

Pitch Letter

Big Picture Questions

## Sample Executive Media Profile

First Lastname, title, Company Name, 212-555-1234, name@company.com

First Lastname is a title in City/State-based Company. She/He has extensive experience in area one, area two and area three. In addition, s/he has example of additional operational or results-oriented success.

Experience in function in specific industry market:

- Type of transaction or relationship
- Another aspect of operations
- Another relevant function

Trends on the Horizon/Upcoming Hot Topics:

- An issue that should be getting more news coverage and requires sophisticated understanding to simplify technical aspects
- A change in the marketplace that will impact businesses or consumers
- How a trend will affect businesses or consumers

“The top players in the specific industry are gearing up for the emerging trends in user preferences. The winners will be those companies that incorporate customer feedback into their operations, products and services.”

To speak with Name, please contact Assistant or Public Relations Consultant at phone or email.



## Sample Pitch Letter

Dear Name of Editor,

As you review the outlook for the specific sector, I may be a good source.

I have worked in the specific industry since 2000 and recently spoke at the Major Conference (or have another noteworthy accomplishment).

Companies in the specific industry sector now face increased challenges:

- Important consideration that will affect many companies;
- Another trend that will impact businesses;
- Some people are not aware that this topic is also a factor.

I am ready to share my perspective in an article for your readers. I look forward to hearing from you to learn your interest in an article, the word count and the deadline for submission.

If you would like to discuss this further, my email and phone are below.

Regards.

Name

## **Big Picture Questions**

### **1. Look at the companies in your industry**

- Who's growing — and how?
- Will consolidation continue, slow down or accelerate?

### **2. Check the consumer segment of the market**

- How are businesses coping with savvy consumers who research everything online, regarding new products and launches
- What are the new products in the pipeline and how will they achieve market share

### **3. Technology considerations**

- How are companies responding to data breaches, security and related issues?
- Where do technology-driven productivity gains most affect operations and employees? Are there layoffs ahead or are companies seeking more tech-savvy candidates?

### **4. The Big Picture**

- What other issues should companies address?
- Which surprising players are likely to emerge?